21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4
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it, carrying on trade with India and the rest of Indo-China. During this period Burmese dancing and music and poetry, as embodied in songs, perhaps assumed definite and national forms. But there was no writing. The kings that came from India probably knew writing, but their knowledge was perhaps limited; in any case, it never reached the people. The introduction of Buddhism into the country brought no writing, as it came through traders whose knowledge of religious learning was meagre. The few religious tracts preserved in monasteries were looked upon merely as curious and sacred objects. The religion, feeble from the beginning, decayed and soon disappeared. The kingdom came to an end in the first century A.D.[1]

A new kingdom was founded in Upper Burma at Pagan, which controlled the land and river trade-routes, and as a result of its commercial advantages, it became a powerful kingdom with the ascension to the throne of Anawrahta in 1044. From that point Burmese history ceases to be conjectural. Through the influence of the learned and saintly monk, Shin Arahan, Buddhism in one of its purest forms was introduced into the kingdom by Anawrahta. With it, writing was also introduced. The alphabet was the 'Square Pali', and the literature the *Three Pitakas* embodying all the religious teachings in Pali. Curiously enough, the alphabet and the literature did not come directly from India, but from Burma itself—from the Talaing kingdom of Thaton. The Talaings were a branch of the Burmese race. Many think that they were a mixture of native tribes with Indian traders. I venture to disagree. The earliest inhabitants of Burma were Indonesians, who settled on the coast of Burma during successive 'drifts' of humanity from the west, through India, to further east. Later, there was an infiltration of Mongolian tribes, who came down the rivers from the North. Inland, where the Indonesian element was weak, the new-comers dominated and later became the Burmese; along the coast where the Indonesian element was strong the tribes united and became the Talaings. However, all this is mere conjecture. The early history of the Talaing kingdom of Thaton, which Anawrahta had to destroy to obtain possession of the alphabet and the *Three Pitakas*, is not known, except that it was perhaps in existence a few centuries before Christ and was under the influence

[1] Pe Maung Tin and G. H. Luce, *The Glass Palace Chronicle*; A. Phayre, *History of Burma*. G. E. Harvey in his *History of Burma* contends that the first Burmese kingdom was Prome, and that it flourished only in about the seventh century A.D.

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

2. Folk Feasts and Spirit Dances

According to legend, the Sanskrit drama was created in the Silver Age to cheer up the people, who were no longer happy as they were in the Golden Age; the Japanese drama was first used by the gods to beguile the sun-goddess to reappear; and the Chinese drama came into being as the result of the Emperor Yuen Tsaung ordering, in the eighth century after Christ, a group of children to be trained to sing the various deeds of the great national heroes before his consort, in appreciation of her love for him.[1] The Burmese, however, have no such legends, and the origins of their drama were in the religious *Nibbatikhin*. But before considering those Burmese miracle plays, perhaps it will not be out of place to give an account of the various folk feasts and spirit dances, which have in them elements essentially dramatic, and which gave some idea of the dramatic to the people and paved a way for the coming of the religious pageants and plays.

Folk feasts can be divided into two classes, those directly connected with Buddhism and those which are not. The Buddhist feasts occur on fixed dates and are celebrated all over the country. Of those, two are especially interesting, the feast of the Full Moon of the month of Tazaungmôn (which occurs in November) and the feast of the New Year (in April). Though the Full Moon of Tazaungmôn is an important Buddhist festival now, it is extremely probable that it was an important feast-day even before the introduction of Buddhism.[2] Special celebrations connected with the date have two distinct elements, the element of mimicry and the element of foolery. On that day, in the villages men dress themselves as animals, wearing appropriate masks, and dance through the village. The animal most commonly imitated is a sort of unicorn known to myth only. The desire to mimic animals probably came before the desire to mimic spirits, and I think the mimicry of animals, such as that we see in these celebrations, was the earliest attempt at the dramatic by the Burmese. Probably the mimicry of animals by men resulted in the presentation of animal puppet shows. In a Burmese puppet show, before the play begins, different animals come out one by

[1] A. B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*; F. A. Lombard, *Japanese Drama*; A. E. Zucker, *Chinese Theatre*.

[2] Some Buddhist festivals in Burma probably are of pre-Buddhist origins (cf. the English Christmas which has many elements derived from pre-Christian times). At least the special celebrations of Tazaungmôn described here are almost certainly pre-Buddhist.

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

527 one, and each gives a special dance of its own.[1] At night, as part of the
796 celebrations, there is a feast of fools. Young men and boys roam the
536 village, throwing *zibyu* fruits at houses and stealing things, which will
174 be found in the centre of the village the next morning: the objects of the good-natured theft are mostly articles that would provoke laughter—such as a lady's under-skirt; or those which would cause temporary inconvenience in the morning—such as cooking utensils, steps from stairs, or a piece from the roof. The Feast of the New Year is one of mirth and foolery. It is known as the Water Festival because on that occasion, every Burman takes a delight in throwing water at his neighbour and getting soaked himself as the result of the other's counter-attack. The men derive great enjoyment from drenching the women, who in their turn are not slow to have their revenge. Young men group themselves and dance joyously along the streets, at times being chased by bands of elderly maiden ladies who lie in wait to catch the ringleaders. When caught, the youths are lightly bound with silken cords and their faces are blackened with soot. Then they are made to perform a monkey dance before being granted their release. The spirit of fun apparent in these Burmese feasts of foolery is akin to that which moved the young clerks of the *Parlement* of Paris and the members of the Inns of Court in London to stage their Feasts of Fools in medieval times.[2]

527 As the villagers lead a communal life and every joy and sorrow of a villager is shared by all others, a joyful event is celebrated by a
[561] public feast. Marriage, birth, the admission of a son to his novitiate (for every Burmese boy enters priesthood for at least a week), and the piercing of the ear of a daughter are occasions for mirth and jollity. At these feasts they sing and dance and mimic, groups of villagers vie with each other for new methods of giving entertainment, and there
[241] is keen rivalry between youths and maidens. The most mirthful feast of all is the Harvest Feast in February, when the paddy has been reaped, and the village is ready to enjoy a well-earned rest of four after a working period of eight months.

527 These folk feasts are of great antiquity, though, because of the
796 essentially unchanging life in the villages, they continue to exist even at the present day. The Tazaungmôn and other Buddhist feasts

[1] The puppet show is described in a later chapter.

[2] Cf. E. K. Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, chap. xiii, 'The Feast of Fools'; also E. Welsford, *The Court Masque*, p. 2.

21: Htin Aung B-6 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

536 *
114

out of the worship of the dead. Most scholars are sceptical of that animistic theory of the origin of the drama. With regard to the Greek drama, Dr Farnell, in *The Cult of the Greek States*, seems to prove clearly that Ridgeway is wrong. Likewise with regard to Sanskrit drama, Dr Keith, in his book on the subject, rejects Ridgeway's theory; and he adds more generally: 'Whether elsewhere the worship of the dead resulted in drama is a matter open to grave doubt. Certainly in the case of the Greek drama, which offers the most interesting parallel to that of India, the evidence of derivation from the funeral games is wholly defective.'[1]

Ridgeway treats of Burmese drama in detail. He knows it only from hearsay. He has never seen a play acted on the Burmese stage, nor has he read any in the original or translation. All his information is purely descriptive of the actual presentation of a play, not of the play itself. His informants knew no Burmese dramatic literature nor did they have any idea as to the history of the drama. Nevertheless, Ridgeway gives quite a good estimate of the nature of the drama. The fault lies chiefly with Mr Taw Sein Kho, on whose information Ridgeway mainly relies. The late Mr Taw Sein Kho was no doubt a great archæologist, but he was a poor student of Burmese literature, and he had absolutely no idea of the origins and development of Burmese drama. In his letter[2] to the Director-General of the Archæological Survey of India, who was in correspondence with him on the nature of Burmese drama at the request of Ridgeway, he wrote: 'The *Ramayana* in an adapted form is also acted. I am inclined to think that it was derived by the Burmans from the Cambodians, because the dresses and stage paraphernalia of the Burmans and Cambodians in acting the play are so strikingly similar.' As the Siamese *Ramayana* was influenced by, or came from the same sources as the Cambodian *Ramayana*, Mr Taw Sein Kho did good detective work. But his letter shows clearly that he was absolutely ignorant of the introduction of the Siamese *Ramayana* into Burma and its results. He seems to have known nothing about the great dramatists, U Kyin U and U Pon Nya, for Ridgeway does not mention them at all.

Ridgeway traces the development of Burmese drama in three main stages:

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114
174

[1] A. B. Keith, *The Sanskrit Drama*.

[2] The letter is quoted in *The Dramas and Dramatic Dances of Non-European Races*.

21: Htin Aung · E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

1. The impersonation of the *nats* by mediums;

2. The true dramatic element borrowed from the Indian historical plays of Rama, presented by puppet players;

3. Drama based on the Indian models, but finding its themes in national history and mythology, intermixed with Buddhistic elements, and performed by puppets and living actors.

I proceed to deal with these three alleged stages.

1. There is no doubt that the impersonation of the *nats* by mediums had, and still has, the element of the dramatic, as I have described. However, it is unreasonable to hold that the impersonation in question was the origin of Burmese drama. Ridgeway puts forward three lines of argument with regard to his theory: (*a*) the worship of the dead and the ritual connected with it have resulted in true dramas in other countries: the impersonation of the *nats* by mediums is a ritual connected with the worship of the dead, and therefore, as in other countries, it has resulted in the rise of a drama; (*b*) the *nat* dances had, and still have, the dramatic element in them; (*c*) the derivation of true Burmese drama from the earliest stages of the drama, the *nat* dances, is proved by the fact that there is a tree in the centre of the 'stage' when a play is being presented. These lines of argument are unsound.

(*a*) Whether the worship of the dead results in drama in other countries is doubtful. We have seen that the view has been controverted as regards Greece and as regards India. Even if it were true of countries around Burma, it would not follow that the theory holds good as regards Burma, for that country has a history and civilization distinctly national because of its geographical barriers.

(*b*) There is no doubt as to the existence of the dramatic element in the *nat* dances. But such an element also existed in the various folk feasts of the Burmese people. Ridgeway has no information regarding them. Though the spirit dances made some contribution to the rise of the drama, they were not mainly responsible, and it could not be said that the drama developed out of those dances. They gave to the country new dances and new dancers, and they developed dancing and music. But the true drama resulted only from the presentation of religious stories by amateurs. The *nat* dancers were essentially professional, and alien to the religious feeling and education that inspired the *Nibhatkhin*. It is true that those professionals later developed the drama, but they did so as professional actors and not as spirit mediums.

On this great national epic were founded many plays. For
538 example, the thirteen Trivandrum plays commonly attributed to the
536* authorship of Bhasa contain two based on the *Ramayana*. The date of the plays is generally accepted as the second or third century after Christ.

2. The Siamese Court Play of *Rama*

177 From about the third century after Christ, the great Hindu expan-
175 sion overseas began in earnest, and as a result many Hindu kingdoms
101 were founded in Indo-China, Malaya, Java, and the surrounding regions. Before that time, very probably there was at least some intercourse between India and those regions, and may be Buddhism was not unknown in the regions mentioned. But by the third century A.D. Buddhism had completely disappeared in them, except for very faint traces remaining in Burma. In India itself, Buddhism was on the wane and Brahmanism was in the ascendant. Therefore when the merchants of Northern India spread a new culture in Indo-China and
[538] the surrounding regions, the culture was distinctly Hindu. The Indians took with them their religious epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*. Though both came to be very well known, the former was perhaps the more popular, probably because it was more finished artistically. Sanskrit plays were also no doubt introduced. The Hindu influence reached its height about the fourth and fifth centuries—in the third century Bhasa was composing his plays, and Kalidasa, the greatest of Hindu-Sanskrit dramatists lived about the year 400. Hindu poems and romances must also have been brought into the newly-founded kingdoms and trading centres.

177 The intensity of the new influence varied in the regions. Burma
101 was nearest and directly on the route from India. But probably
174 there was already a strong native civilization, and Hindu culture failed to take root. Along the coast, however, at Thaton, there was quite a strong outpost of Hindu culture, but even there the Hindu influence was quite negligible compared with regions farther east. In Cambodia the new culture was especially favoured, and in Java, Sumatra and the Malay peninsula, it took deep root. In Siam, however, the intensity was much less. In the narrow circle of the court the Hindu influence was strong, but the people were quite untouched by it. The chief reason was very probably the continuous, peaceful invasion by people from the north, the Shans, or at least the forefathers of the modern Shans. According to some scholars, they were Buddhists, which is not unlikely as Buddhism, in a modified form,

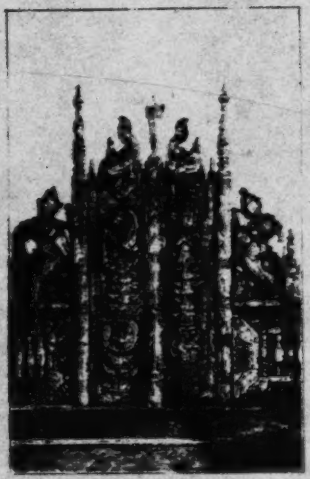
[i.e., the Ramayana -- ANALYST]

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

was prevailing in China and Tibet by about the third century A.D. In any case, the ever-increasing population, alien to Hindu culture, must have acted against the intensity of the Hindu influence. Moreover, Siam was one of the earliest converts from Hinduism to Buddhism which, especially after the great Buddhist missionary, Buddhagosa, who lived in the fifth century, was ousting Brahmanism in Indo-China. At the Siamese court, however, the Hindu tradition was very strong, and remained so even when the king and his courtiers had become Buddhists.

In Siam, as in the neighbouring regions, learning did not reach the people for a long time even though it flourished at the court. The Hindu tradition was not strong enough to prevent the courtiers from creating a native literature. Buddhism prevented the courtiers from looking upon the Hindu learning with a conservatism that would not have allowed imitations. In Cambodia and elsewhere native ideas could never shake off the dominance of Hindu culture, and no native literature could come into being until quite modern times. Moreover, the very fact that the Hindu tradition was strong prevented the survival of Sanskrit literature in those regions, for once the tradition was broken, only chaos resulted. To make it clear, I will take the Java shadow-play. Sanskrit dramatic representation gave rise to the Java shadow-play. Therefore, one would expect Java to preserve a Hindu dramatic literature to herself and to the world. But it failed to do so. The shadow-play of Java is interesting as a special kind of dramatic performance, and not as dramatic literature. The stories that are presented on the shadow-stage in Java are taken mostly from the Hindu epics, but they have very little dramatic structure. Yet originally they must have been developed Sanskrit plays. Of course, to begin with, the Sanskrit shadow-plays themselves were slight in structure, but by no means so crude as the Javanese ones. The Hindu tradition was so strong that once it was destroyed, not only did the Hindu drama in Java decay and disappear, but a native drama in a developed form failed to appear. Stories from Hindu sources as well as stories from native history and mythology are still shown on the Java shadow-stage, but the plays are all formless and crude. In Cambodia, where the Hindu tradition was indeed very strong and lasted much longer, some remnants of the developed Sanskrit drama are preserved, but the tradition was so strong that no native element could enter it. There, up to the present day, a State theatre, with a special minister

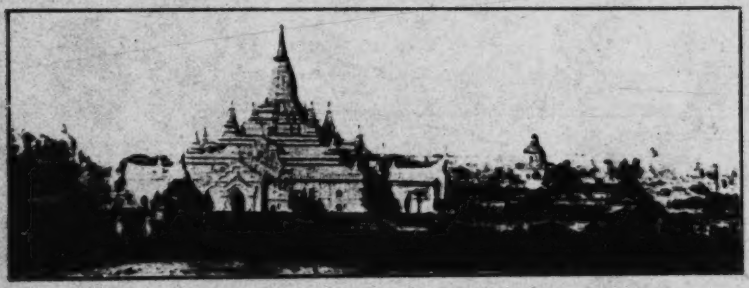
25: Ferrars E-5 (ca. 1890) 1901 APl Burma
Burmese AP4



7. ANCIENT GATE, WITH FIGURES OF THADYA-MIN AND KEINNAYA.

is part of India. The phrase *Indo-China* is also misleading unless in respect of geography. In respect of climate, flora and fauna, *Further India* is not inapplicable. A probable Indo-Aryan admixture exists in the north-east (Arakán). But Burma Proper and Pegu are as distinct from India as Tibet itself.

The original Burman tribes are conjectured to have pushed their way south from the mountains of Tibet. They divided into three principal branches, Arakán (*Rakáing, Yakáing*) on the west, Paung on the east, and Burma (*Bamá*), which attained to the chief position, in the middle, on the northern Irawadi (*E-ya wadi*). Nothing is known of the early history of these nations. But it is certain that in 1000 A.D. Burma was a large and powerful kingdom, with its seat at Pagán. About that time the first historical conquest of the lower Irawadi was effected. From the fact that the country was not permanently subdued it may be inferred that the power of the Mun or Peguan race (later called Talaing) was not greatly inferior to that of the Burman. The Muns, from the affinities of their language, are conjectured to be of Annamitic origin. There is mention of the Pagán kingdom independently of the Burman chronicles, and there is above all the evidence of the ruins of Pagán, probably the mightiest of their kind. They testify to the power of the kingdom and the influence of the



8. ANANDA PAYA, PAGAN.

29: Slater M-4 (no date) 1951 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

565 562 779* in the middle of the last century, that Burmese women not only enjoyed a much freer and higher position than elsewhere in the East but, in some matters, had attained rights that their sisters in England were still seeking to obtain.[26] These and similar aspects of Burmese life must be attributed in large degree to the dominant influence of Buddhism in a country which has been left for hundreds of years, shut away from the surrounding world by its seaboard and mountain barriers, to work out its own salvation with only occasional interference from outside until modern times.

779* ●174 177 It is possible that the first Buddhist monastery in Burma was established more than two thousand years ago. While we may be sceptical of the legend which attributes the conversion of the first Burmese disciples to the Buddha himself, there is perhaps less reason than formerly to question the persistent Burmese tradition that missionaries were sent from India to Burma after the Third Great Council in the time of Aśoka. We have, at any rate, shreds of reliable evidence relating to the early centuries of the Christian era. In Burma, as elsewhere, the archaeologist has been active in recent years and there are also illuminating references in Chinese and other texts. Examining the evidence now available, Mr. Nihar-Ranjan Ray has presented a substantial argument for the conclusion that Buddhism was introduced to Burma possibly in Aśoka's day, probably by the third century A.D. and certainly by the fifth century A.D.[27] In these earlier centuries, Burma was parcelled into small kingdoms, and all that can be said is that, at certain capitals, there were strong centres of Buddhist influence.[28]

175 779* 177 It is, however, sufficient for our present purpose to be able to trace the dominating influence of Buddhism throughout the country from the eleventh century onwards. In this century, the turning point in Burmese story, the curtain of history lifts to reveal A-naw-ra-hta, the Burmese Constantine, moving southwards from his capital at Pagan to vanquish the king of Thaton and annex his dominion. According to the Burmese chroniclers, the motive for this advance was not mere lust of conquest but zeal for the true faith. King A-naw-ra-hta had been converted by a monk from the south, Shin Arahan of Thaton. But 'without the scriptures there can be no study, without study there can be no intuition.' To obtain these scriptures, the Pali scriptures, A-naw-ra-hta must needs subdue his rival at Thaton who possessed them.

000 What is of further importance for our present inquiry is the fact that

[26] Forbes, *British Burma and Its People*, chap. III, p. 55.

[27] Ray, op. cit. chap. I, pp. 33ff.

[28] *Ibid.*, chap. I, pp. 33ff., 81; cf. Taw Sein Kho, *Census of India Report* (Burma 1901), XII, 32.